

# PRACTICE GUIDE

## Housing needs and joint action planning

This practice guide provides information about the partnership approach between the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works (Housing) and the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (Child Safety) to meeting the housing needs of children and young people in need of protection, including the development of joint action plans.

### Working in partnership

The [Memorandum of Understanding between The State of Queensland through the Department of Child Safety and The State of Queensland through the Department of Housing 2007](#) (MOU) provides a framework for communication, cooperation and coordination between Housing and Child Safety, and a way of working together to improve service responses to children in need of protection. Through the MOU, the joint action plan process was developed, to support timely service delivery coordination and collaboration to meet the housing needs of children and young people in need of protection.

### When to make a referral to Housing


A referral to Housing is made when Child Safety identify a housing need for a child or young person who is:

- at risk of being removed from their family
- at risk of being removed from their family after birth
- living with an approved foster or kinship carer, but is returning to live with their family
- living with an approved foster or kinship carer, or
- transitioning to adulthood, including young people who have left care, up to the age of 25 years  
and
- the child's current or planned housing circumstances significantly contribute (or are likely to contribute) to the child being harmed, or being at risk of harm; and alternative housing is likely to significantly reduce this harm or risk of harm  
or
- the child's current or planned housing circumstances significantly contribute (or are likely to contribute) to the child's care needs not being met and alternative housing will enable the care needs to be met  
or
- an unborn child's parent's housing circumstances significantly contribute to the risk of harm the unborn child is likely to experience after birth and alternative housing is likely to significantly reduce the risk of harm.

### Referral process

The housing need must be significant, impacting on the ability to achieve case plan goals and necessary to reduce harm or the risk of harm to a child or young person.





It is preferable that Child Safety initiates contact with the Housing Service Centre once the child or young person **reaches 15 years of age** and has been identified through Child Safety's case planning as having a housing need.

A formal referral process, (that is, the development of the joint action plan), should commence once the young person is **approaching 17 years of age**, to help determine the urgency of their needs, the level of housing assistance required and other relevant housing matters.

It is important that referrals are made immediately after a housing need is identified, to ensure service planning is actioned in a timely way. This is particularly important for young people transitioning to adulthood, including young people with disability.

With the exception of young people transitioning to adulthood, the Housing 'customer' is the carer or parent of the child or young person, depending on the child's circumstances and the case plan goal.

## **Joint action plans**

A joint action plan is a written record of the housing needs of the child or young person and the actions required to address these needs.

### **When to develop a joint action plan**

A joint action plan is developed when:

- a housing need is identified as a significant factor impacting a child or young person in need of protection
- the housing need is
  - impeding the ability to achieve case plan goals or
  - is included as part of a young person's transition to adulthood plan.

For example, a joint action plan would be developed for a kinship carer who has agreed to care for a child but is living in unsuitable housing (a one-bedroom caravan) without access to alternative housing.

The purpose of the joint action plan is to:

- promote future-focussed planning and timely service responses to ensure the delivery of suitable housing outcomes for the child or young person
- share information about the housing needs of a child or young person to support informed decision making
- identify individual and joint actions for involved stakeholders, including Child Safety and Housing
- provide a verification source to support application for housing assistance.

### **Who will be involved in developing the joint action plan**

At a minimum, the joint action plan is developed with input from the Child Safety Officer (CSO), senior team leader and a Senior Client Service Manager (SCSM) or other delegated officer from Housing.

While not mandatory, the parents, carers or young person being referred, are encouraged to attend joint action plan meetings to:

- inform service planning discussions
- have ownership and make informed choice about their housing assistance options
- gain an understanding of their obligations regarding any housing assistance offered.



For young people transitioning to adulthood, the inclusion of a mentor, a member of their safety and support network or transition officer will help with identifying and resolving other identified needs. Engaging in the joint action plan process allows for the young person's needs and barriers to tenancy access and stability (current or historical) to be discussed and managed.

### **Developing the joint action plan**

The joint action plan will be developed in a meeting scheduled and coordinated by Housing. The meeting may be completed in person, by telephone or online. To prepare for participation in the joint action plan meeting, review Attachment 1 and consider the questions contained in the joint action plan. If Housing and Child Safety agree certain questions do not need to be answered due to sufficient information being provided in the referral, those sections will be recorded as not applicable.

Seek the child or young person's views about sharing a copy of their case plan to support decision making. The case plan may assist in determining the most appropriate service response for the child or young person, however consideration should be given to the child or young person's circumstances, the sensitivity of case plan information and whether the information is relevant or has an impact on the type of housing and services required.

Both Child Safety and Housing keep a copy of the joint action plan on the relevant file.

### **Decision and delivery**

Based on information gathered during the joint action plan meeting, Housing and Child Safety will identify the types of housing assistance that may be suitable for the customer. If housing barriers are identified, Housing and Child Safety may identify what tenancy or supports are available to assist the customer reduce the likelihood of tenancy challenges and increase the likelihood of a successful tenancy.

### **Reviewing the joint action plan**

The joint action plan is a 'point in time' document. When there are changes of circumstance, for example, a change to the child or young person's needs, the level of urgency for housing support, or a change in case plan goals and timeframes, then the joint action plan needs to be reviewed.

An updated joint action plan will ensure both Child Safety and Housing are aware of the progress or change in circumstances and identify actions or barriers to address the change. For example, if reunification is to occur quickly or be delayed, this information needs to be shared with Housing.

A review of the joint action plan can also be triggered when:

- a suitable housing solution becomes available
- the housing needs has been resolved, for example, a parent secures suitable long-term accommodation.

## **Version history**

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## Attachment 1

| Joint action plan question                                                                                                        | Things to consider                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Example response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Explain how the child or young person's housing needs relate to their protection or care needs or transition to adulthood?</p> | <p>A housing solution may be needed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist with reunification of a child to their parents</li> <li>• facilitate a placement with a foster or kinship carer</li> <li>• prevent the removal of a child from their parents</li> <li>• support a young person's transition to adulthood</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>The child has been assessed as a child in need of protection and the provision of housing will support reunification to the mother's care.</p> <p>The child is currently in care, however, in the coming months contact with the mother will increase and shift to unsupervised in the family home. Suitable housing is required to support increased contact and reunification.</p> |
| <p>What are the existing housing circumstances of the family, carer, child or young person?</p>                                   | <p>The existing housing situation can guide decisions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timeframes of housing solutions that may be more successful than others</li> <li>• the type of support the person may require</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>The parents are couch surfing with friends and associates known to them. They have no stable place to live and have at times slept on the streets. The housing circumstances is tenuous with some overcrowding, illegal activity and inconsistency in access to essentials, such as electricity which is unsuitable for the safe care of a two-year old child.</p>                   |
| <p>How do the current housing circumstances not meet the child or young person's protective needs?</p>                            | <p>Be clear on why the existing housing circumstances are inappropriate.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the carer household overcrowded because a care arrangement that was planned to be short-term placement has been extended?</li> <li>• Is a kinship carer living in a housing situation that is inappropriate for children?</li> <li>• Is a parent living in temporary or inappropriate accommodation and there is a risk their children will be removed because of this?</li> <li>• Is a young person living in accommodation that places them at an increased risk of exposure</li> </ul> | <p>The parent's friends with whom they have been couch surfing do not have sufficient space for the parents or child to have privacy (a bedroom or bed). The parents have also identified they may struggle to maintain sobriety if they continue to reside with associates who use drugs.</p>                                                                                          |



| Joint action plan question                                                                                                                                                                   | Things to consider                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Example response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                              | to unsafe situations or high-risk behaviour?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>What is the timeframe for a housing solution to be delivered to address the child or young person's protection or care needs? If urgent, please indicate the reasons for the urgency.</p> | <p>Timeframes can range from as soon as possible, within 3 months to two years' time, depending on the circumstances.</p> <p>Young people transitioning to adulthood may be referred from the year they turn 15 years of age.</p> <p>In other situations, a quick response may be required, for example a sibling group is removed from a parent and a kinship carer has been located but the children can't be placed until suitable accommodation is found.</p> | <p>Once suitable housing is located, reunification of the child to their parents can be expedited. There is currently six months until the child protection order expires, therefore housing needs to be secured within this timeframe to allow for the child's timely, planned transition home.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p>Has the Housing Service Centre identified any factors that may affect meeting the required timeframe?</p>                                                                                 | <p>Factors could include housing stock availability or affordability.</p> <p>It is important all involved stakeholders manage expectations and reaffirm that not all referrals for housing will result in social housing. A referral may result in Housing support to access private rental products via bond loans or community housing options.</p>                                                                                                             | <p>Stock availability and affordability in the identified suburbs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>How will the child or young person be affected if a housing solution is not available in the nominated timeframe?</p>                                                                     | <p>Impacts could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homelessness</li> <li>• a child being removed from their parents</li> <li>• a carer being unable to accept the placement of a child</li> <li>• a young person turning 18 and having to return to live with unsafe family members.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                               | <p>If a housing solution is not identified within the timeframe, the child will be unable to be reunified to their parents who are ready to have significant amounts of contact in the home to progress reunification.</p> <p>Child Safety may need to seek an additional child protection order that wouldn't otherwise be required if the parents had housing. The child will continue to be live in a care arrangement, unnecessarily impacting on the attachment between the parents and child.</p> |





| Joint action plan question                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Things to consider                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Example response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <p>Does the child, young person or any relevant household member have a medical condition or disability, or have any additional support needs that affect the type of housing they need?</p>                                                                       | <p>Consider the type of medical condition, disability or additional support needs and the impact on the suitability of housing solutions.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>The child has been diagnosed with developmental delays and struggles with gross motor skills. To support independent, safe play and development, a fenced yard is strongly recommended.</p> <p>Due to violence perpetrated towards the mother by the child's father, a housing solution with a lockable fence and screens on doors and windows is strongly recommended.</p> |
| <p>What is the cultural background and/or identity of the child or young person? What considerations need to be given to support the child or young person to maintain a connection to their cultural, kinship ties or culturally responsive support services?</p> | <p>Consider the cultural needs of the family and whether housing solutions need to be located in close proximity to culturally specific services or religious centres to ensure ongoing connection to culture, kin and community.</p> <p>For an individual or the family from culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD), consideration should be given to maintaining the individual or family's connection to family, community, language, religion and culture, e.g., a family identify as Sudanese and require language assistance to access mainstream services. Housing solutions must be within close proximity to culturally specific services.</p> | <p>The child and family identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with strong and established links to their community and country. To ensure a continuation of family support, identified support service access and connection to country, a housing solution in the local area is recommended.</p>                                                              |
| <p>Based on the current case plan for the child or young person, how long will housing be needed?</p>                                                                                                                                                              | <p>If a housing solution is only required for a time limited period then further discussions are required regarding the most appropriate response.</p> <p>It is important that housing is a need recorded in the child's case plan.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>It is anticipated the child will require long-term accommodation upon reunification to the fulltime care of their parents.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>Does the child or young person have any specific locational requirements, for example, a need to be close to schools, relatives, maintaining connection to their</p>                                                                                            | <p>Children in contact with the child protection system may have increased locational requirements due to a need to ensure continuity of access to safety and support networks, involved service providers and transport limitations.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>The mother's community supports are on the north side of Brisbane and the child currently attends day care at Morayfield. Housing nearby these areas would ensure continued monitoring, support and</p>                                                                                                                                                                     |



| Joint action plan question                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Things to consider                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Example response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <p>culture, access to essential services etc. Please explain why the child or young person needs to live in a particular area.</p>                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>access to established safety and support networks.</p> <p>The mother has experienced domestic and family violence perpetrated by the father. To help ensure their safety, the mother and child require a housing solution outside of the South-East Queensland region.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p>Describe the types of support the young person needs to successfully transition into independent living or to maintain a tenancy (for example, budgeting, daily living skills, tenancy management skills). How will this support be provided?</p> | <p>It is important to ensure all challenges and barriers to the young person successfully transitioning are identified and appropriate supports established. For example, a young person living independently for the first time is likely to require significant support.</p> <p>For young people experiencing alcohol and other drugs (AOD), mental health or has a disability. If no current services engaged, identify as a potential impact on the housing stability and sustainability. Outline services previously engaged with, if known, or those required.</p> | <p>The young person is actively working with a Family Intervention Service on developing budgeting skills and daily household routines. No additional assistance has been identified to maintain the tenancy.</p> <p>The parents have been linked with Drug ARM in the past. At this time, the parents are only engaged with mental health (worker's name) who is also providing support regarding historical AOD use.</p> <p>The young person with disability requires assessment of their eligibility for NDIS to meet their support needs. Assessment and Referral team can assist with the process.</p> |