

# Alterations and Modifications Policy

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Policy owner: Senior Facilities Manager

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all requests for Alteration and Modifications are assessed and delivered in accordance with legislative and Unison standards.

## Scope

This policy applies to all requests for alteration and modification raised by Unison staff, tenants or their advocate. This policy applies to tenants who live in a Unison owned or managed property, including DHHS General Lease properties.

This policy does not apply where the tenancy is provided through our homelessness services (e.g. Crisis Accommodation or Head-lease program), THM (Transitional Accommodation), DHHS (Public Housing), UPC (Private Rental) or where requests are managed by another party through other commercial agreements.

## Principles

Unison tenants can make requests to their Place Manager for property alterations and modifications. Requests can be made directly or through a nominated agent or advocate (e.g. support worker or family member). Unison will consult with the tenant, or their nominated agent, to adequately assess requests and will consider all requests in the context of the following:

- Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (RTA) requirements
- Conditions and standards defined by relevant authorities (e.g. Local and State Government departments and authorities)
- Tenant's acceptance of responsibility and conditions as outlined in this policy
- Cost and extent of the works required
- Future use of the property
- Availability of alternative properties that would meet the tenant's needs.

Where alterations require third party approvals (e.g. building permit, authorisation from building owner), Unison will only provide approval after considering the requirements for and obtaining relevant approvals.

## Application

## Responsibilities and Conditions

An alteration to a property, fixture or fitting without written permission breaches the RTA and action can be taken in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to request that the tenant remove the alteration, repair any goods damaged by the removal of the alteration or to terminate the tenancy.

Tenants must accept the following conditions:

- Unison and tenants must comply with their rights and obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997.
- Tenants must not, without Unison's consent:
  - Install any fixtures on the rented premises
  - Make any alteration, renovation or addition to the rented premises.
- Tenants must submit a completed Tenant Modifications & Fixtures Request Form to their Place Manager for approval
- Approved works will only be delivered by an approved contractor provided by Unison
- Any modification/alteration to fixture or fittings, must be reinstated at the tenant's cost at the end of the tenancy.
- Modifications/alterations must **not** impact on the following:
  - Current design of property (internal and external)
  - Entry and exits
  - Adjoining neighbours
  - Asset standard
  - Structural integrity
  - Property Compliance
- Request will be declined when the modification/alteration:
  - Cannot be maintained or removed easily
  - Involves major internal or external changes to the existing property
  - Is prohibited under any law or fails to comply with any caveats or covenants

Tenants will be required to bear the cost of works for all Alterations and Modifications both Essential and Non-Essential works prior to works commencing.

A payment plan may be provided by Unison in exceptional circumstances for social housing tenants, such as where a modification is necessary for health or other reasons. A Unison payment plan must be approved by the Senior Facilities Manager based on discussions with the Director, Housing and Homelessness. Approval of a Unison payment plan is subject to confirmation that all other avenues of financial assistance have been exhausted (e.g. support agency brokerage funds, NDIS), confirmation that the tenant is not in rental arrears and that other avenues such as a transfer to another more suitable property have been explored.

Tenants in Unison social housing seeking a payment plan for installation of air conditioning must be able to demonstrate that they have been approved to receive a Medical Cooling Concession.

Unison will not share confidential tenant information without written consent.

## Appeal

If a tenant disagrees with a decision Unison has made, they should first discuss their concerns with their Place Manager. The next step, if the tenant is still of the opinion that the decision was unreasonable, is to refer the matter to the place manager's Manager for review and if the matter is still not resolved to the tenants satisfaction, have the matter heard by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

## Glossary

**RTA:** Residential Tenancies Act (1997)

**VCAT:** Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

**Essential Alterations and Modifications:** Essential works are defined as works that will provide a significant improvement to how the tenant lives in the unit and are typically raised following assessment by an occupational therapist or medical practitioner. Examples include installation of support rails or mobility aids.

**Non-Essential Alterations and Modifications:** Non-Essential works are defined as adding limited improvement to how the tenant lives in the unit. Requests do not require supporting documentation and can be raised by anyone. Examples include flooring upgrades, repainting, and cabinetry modifications.

## Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years as delegated by the responsible Executive team member.